

Home & Garden Education Center



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PLANT SCIENCE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
EXTENSION

Start Rose Care Now

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While we are still waiting for those April showers to give us May flowers, the warming spring temperatures are causing buds to swell and expand on many plants including our roses. Winter is tough on roses and often part or all of a cane dies back due to frigid temperatures or desiccation. Brown or black sections should be pruned out as they are quite obvious now that the healthy parts of the stem have greened up and leaf buds are visible.

Aside from removal of dead stem sections, now is the best time to prune hybrid tea, grandiflora and floribunda roses to stimulate new growth and improve their shape. First remove the dead or damaged stems, then prune out branches growing towards the middle of the bush and any that are crossing. Leave 3 to 5 strong canes on each plant. When pruning, make your cuts at a slight angle about one-quarter inch above a healthy outward facing bud.

Also, look for suckers (excessively vigorous shoots) that have arisen from the rootstock on grafted roses and remove them to at their base. This can sometimes mean removing a bit of soil to follow the sucker to its origin. Typically, hybrid teas and grandifloras are grafted onto the rootstock of another rose species usually for traits such as hardiness. Often the UConn Home & Garden Education Center gets calls about rose plants with two different colored blossoms or even about rose plants changing color. This happens when the suckers are allowed to grow and blossom and, being more vigorous, they eventually overrun the named rose variety.

Paul McCartney rose image by Lisa Rivers



Old-fashioned rambling roses bloom once a year on old wood so are best pruned after they flower. Clump forming roses, like rugosas and a few other shrub types, grow from their own roots but send up multiple shoots each year. Control their spread by cutting wayward or unwanted stems to the ground early in the spring.

Spring is a great time for planting new roses. Roses ordered through the mail usually come bare-root while those purchased at the local garden center are in containers. Open packages of mail ordered roses immediately and inspect them. Their roots are usually wrapped in some type of moistened packing material. Plant bare-root

roses as soon as possible. If they need to be held for just a day or two, make sure their packing material stays moist and store them in a cool, dark place. When it is necessary to delay their planting for a longer time, it is usually advisable to either heel them in outdoors in a shaded, sheltered spot or pot them up. Soak bare-root plants for about an hour before planting.

When ready to plant, dig a good-sized hole that is slightly wider than the roots and deep enough so that the bud union (graft) can be set 1 inch below the soil surface. This will protect the grafted part from severe winter temperatures and also discourage suckers arising from the rootstock. Set the bare-root rose so that the roots are evenly spread out and not crowded or winding in a circle.

Remove roses from their containers and gently tease apart some the roots to encourage new root growth. Potted roses are sometimes root bound. If roots are vigorously encircling the container, use a soil knife to remove the bottom half inch or so of roots and lightly loosen the remaining roots before planting.

Plant roses in a sunny spot with good drainage. Roses appreciate a soil amended with moderate amounts of organic matter and a pH between 6.0 to 6.5. Incorporate any limestone and organic matter before planting. Follow the recommendations from a [soil test](#) or add about 5 pounds of limestone per 100 square feet of planting bed. An inch of a low nutrient leaf compost or an organic material like peat moss can also be mixed into the soil

Roses that bloom all summer require a steady supply of nutrients. Without soil test recommendations, work in a quarter cup of a fertilizer such as 5-10-10 around each rose bush in April, May and June. Do not apply fertilizer after July as doing so can stimulate new growth, which will not have time to harden off before cold winter temperatures arrive. Wait one month before fertilizing any newly planted rose bushes. Roses that bloom only once a year are just fertilized once a year, usually when new growth is noticed in spring.

To ensure healthy, vigorous growth and an abundance of blooms, give your rose plants about an inch of water per week if not provided by precipitation. Use a shredded bark or mini-chip bark mulch around plants to keep weeds down and to conserve moisture. Keep an eye out for rose pests including Japanese beetles, powdery mildew or black spot.

Get your roses off to a good start this spring. If you have questions about rose care or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our [website](#) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.